

Holiness And The "Reformation Of Manners"

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Among the stirring events of 1963 was the quickening of social revolution in the United States, highlighted by the Birmingham mob, the August march on Washington, and the designation of Martin Luther King as the "man of the year" by *Time* magazine. The march on Washington was viewed by many evangelical Christians in a rather detached and ambivalent manner; however, the leading editorial in *Christianity Today* asked a pointed question, "Where were the evangelicals on August 28?" The question calls for more than a momentary twinge of conscience. A related question is pertinent to the segment of evangelicals known as the Holiness Movement. How effective are the advocates of "perfect love" in helping rectify community mores that are sub-Christian? Have the "perfectionists" been true to their heritage? Are they committed and articulate in facing this and related issues? Will they become involved only after it becomes too late for their witness to be significant?

The past can often clarify perspectives for the present. Over the Archives Building, Washington, D.C., may be found words like these, "The seeds of the past are the clues to the future." It is true also that historic insight gives prophetic foresight. It is often said that Pietism has never shown adequate interest in man's welfare in this present life. It has traditionally confined its interest almost entirely to getting a person ready for the next life. While there is some justification for this generalization, the indictment is not fully merited by the facts. F. N. Flew points out that the early Methodists were so busy winning individual's souls that they did not concern themselves enough with social justice.¹ This indictment is generally true of the perfectionist movement known as monasticism, but it is

1. R. N. Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology* (Oxford, 1943), p. 338.

hardly true of evangelical perfectionism, at least when it has been true to its own inward genius.

Perfect Love Calls for Justice

It was the Quakers, or Friends, who were and still are most successful in combining a concern for inward righteousness with a concern for righteousness in society. This is seen in the passion for social righteousness in George Fox, William Penn, and especially John Woolman. In fact, John Woolman was one of the first effective voices raised in condemnation of slavery as he saw it in American colonies. The early Methodists, likewise, showed this dual concern for personal righteousness and social betterment. In addition to their diligence in Bible study and their faithfulness in attending the sacraments, they were zealous in visiting the sick and those who were in prison. They not only tried to keep themselves unspotted from the world but also visited "the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (Jas. 1:27). The man of letters, Samuel Johnson, complained of Wesley that he did not have leisure enough to converse, but had to be on his way to visit some impoverished family or to perform some similar work of charity. After the Wesley brothers had discovered the object of their quest, so far as personal salvation was concerned, the young preachers that they had gathered about them raised at the appropriate time the question as to the main purpose of the early Methodist movement. The answer was summed up in these terse words, "To reform the nation, and to spread Scriptural holiness over these lands." In spite of critics who charged that the early Methodists were more concerned with plucking individual brands from the burning than they were with the ills of society, the facts would seem to be otherwise with respect to early Methodists, and to John Wesley in particular. While the Church of England was largely negligent with respect to the emerging working classes resulting from the Industrial Revolution, it was the early evangelicals who concerned themselves with these classes. It was George Whitefield and John Wesley who pioneered in field evangelism. Oxford don, John Wesley, preached regularly to coal miners at five a.m. It is true that their concern was with the evangelization of the masses, but this was closely followed by a concern with the total well-being of their converts. Wesley pioneered in the production of

literature for the intellectual and spiritual enlightenment of the common people. He was interested in an "electrical machine" for the cure of diseases; he was an innovator in health clinics. The first free dispensary in London was established by John Wesley. A benevolent loan society was organized by him as well as a charity fund for the needy. In addition, he zealously opposed slavery, promoted temperance, and condemned corrupt politics. On one occasion he wrote, "There is the closest connection... between my religious and my political conduct."²

Among the most effective evangelical agencies for the linking of evangelism with social concern is that child of Methodism, the Salvation Army. Perhaps no group has been more insistent upon combining evangelism and Christian perfection with social concern. This linking is not accidental, for the joining of love of God with love to neighbor is one of the cardinal doctrines of Jesus, of Paul, and of the Bible generally. Perhaps no scholar who points out this synthesis in early Methodism would contend that it always remained joined. Today there are those who stress the social gospel to the neglect of Christian perfection. And there are those who stress Christian perfection to the neglect of the social ills of mankind. Among the first to lament this neglect was one who stood outside the Wesleyan tradition. He put it in these words:

There was one doctrine of John Wesley's--the doctrine of perfect sanctification--which ought to have led to a great and original ethical development; but the doctrine has not grown; it seems to remain just where John Wesley left it. There has been a want of the genius or the courage to attempt the solution of the immense practical questions which the doctrine suggests. The questions have not been raised--much less solved. To have raised them effectively, indeed, would have been to originate an ethical revolution which would have had a far deeper effect... than was produced by the Reformation.³

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the revival associated with early Methodism is the importance attached to

2. John Wesley, *Letters* (London: Epworth Press) V, 267.

3. Robert William Dale, *The Evangelical Revival and Other Sermons* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1880), p. 29.

the common person, to the individual. Methodism was the dominant force in the religious aspect of the eighteenth century revolution which "so profoundly modified all existing institutions."⁴ It is often said that Pietism, including early Methodism, tended to justify or to sanctify existing social institutions. There is some truth in this as seen in the fact that Wesley deplored the spirit of revolt in the English colonies of North America. It should be pointed out, however, that Wesley did not deplore the desire of the individual to govern himself. He rather deplored the *method* of revolt to accomplish this end. Brailsford charges that with the early Methodists "meekness and patience... together with a practical faith in the rewards of the next life, left them more defenseless than ever in the face of exploitation."⁵ The same indictment would have to be lodged against the New Testament where in the Epistle of James the oppressed classes were urged to be patient for the redress of grievances (Jas. 5:7, 9; I Pet. 2:18-25). In other words, the evangelical position, influenced as it is by the New Testament, while insisting that justice be done and warning of judgment against injustice, still insists that revolution is not the proper means for this end. In addition, it is concerned with the removal of causes as well as temporary relief of distress.

Social Concern in the U.S.A.

The first Great Awakening, under Jonathan Edwards and others, brought religion to the masses for the first time in recent history. During the first hundred years, organized religion in the American colonies was associated with the privileged few. The majority of the colonists were from the lower economic classes of the Old World, with only a slight attachment to the church. A new sense of individual worth, which was fostered by the colonies, set the stage for a revival of religion which did reach the masses.⁶ The awakenings in

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4. H. R. Niebuhr, *The Social Forces of Denominationalism* (New York: Henry Holt), p. 65.
 5. M. R. Brailsford, *A Tale of Two Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 191.
 6. William Warren Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America* (New York: Scribners, 1943), pp. 271 ff.

the Middle Colonies and later in the south during the eighteenth century laid the foundation for the desire for full freedom which led to the Revolutionary War. This was certainly at least as important a factor in the desire for freedom as was the influence of the French Revolution.

The second great awakening of the early 1800's also had very important social results. Following the revival of 1800 and 1801, west of the Alleghenies and on the Atlantic Coast as well, a series of reform movements arose. This resulted in agitation for the abolition of dueling, which led to its being outlawed. Temperance societies were another important result of the Second Great Awakening. The church became less insular and more mission-minded, with the result that missionary movements were organized. The ecumenical spirit began to compete with denominationalism, resulting in such movements as the Bible societies, which transcended denominational lines. Inter-denominational missionary societies followed later. The temperance movement was another by-product of the revivals. Among the leading advocates of temperance were the evangelists, including Finney, Moody, and Billy Sunday. Practically all movements in the direction of humanitarian principles, for the uplift of the individual, for the emancipation of the common man, were related to the church, to Christian impulses. The history of such movements shows that after the church has taken the initiative, secular forces take over and the movement becomes secularized. This is perhaps as it should be, but the role of the church in initiating and sponsoring such movements should be appreciated. The same conditions are at work today in the newer mission fields of the world. The church takes the initiative in the founding of schools, of social reform, of medicine; then, as the government becomes more influenced by Christian gospel, society itself tends to be responsible. But the basic recognition of the sin of man's inhumanity to man is due to the preaching of the Gospel. Likewise, the conviction that one should be his brother's keeper, that one should have responsibility for the underprivileged in society, is the Gospel's contribution to the modern state.

Revivalism, perfectionism and reforms gained steadily in influence during the nineteenth century. The revivals which marked the beginning of the nineteenth century found a new impetus in the 1830's under men like Charles G. Finney.

Finney, Asa Mahan, and Oberlin College in Ohio, espoused the doctrine of Christian perfection almost identical with that propounded by the Wesleys. After Finney's eclipse, other revivalists were widely appreciated. Revival meetings became the common practice among rural churches and urban churches as well. The *Watchman and Reflector* published in Boston, editorialized in 1854 that revivals of religion were indispensable.⁷ The Congregationalists published a book by evangelist Henry Clay Fish, a graduate of Union Theological Seminary in New York, entitled *Primitive Piety Revived*; this helped pave the way for the nationwide revival of 1858, and earned for its author an honorary doctorate from the University of Rochester.⁸ At the seminary in Andover, Massachusetts, Ebenezer Porter declared in 1832 that ministers should be revival men. At Amherst College, President Humphrey (1824-1845) stressed the importance of revivalism and scheduled regular series of revival meetings in the college. During the presidency of Mark Hopkins at Williams College, revivals were the common procedure. At Yale, Leonard Bacon, pastor of the first church, New Haven (1825-1866), had protracted revival meetings in his church for many years. Yale College experienced a revival of religion in 1857-58, in the liberal evangelistic spirit which had characterized the college for the previous half century. In these years revivalism and liberalism were in close alliance. The reactionaries and the conservatives for the most part were the older churches--Lutherans, Anglicans and Reformed Churches. Tremont Temple and Park Street Church, Boston, were revivalistic churches. Revivalism was welcomed in many segments of the Lutheran Church, together with a call for the espousal of tract societies, temperance organizations, Bible societies, and missions. Revivalism, social reform, and perfectionism flourished in that sequence from 1800 to 1860. Thus by the middle of the nineteenth century, revivalism and a concern with holiness was characteristic not only of Methodist churches but of many Baptist, Congregational, Presbyterian, and Lutheran congregations.

7. Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 48.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Holiness and Moral Issues

The Civil War produced a religious crisis as well as a political and economic crisis. For the most part the evangelicals espoused the cause of abolition and called for the rejection of the institution of slavery. In many instances, church leaders were presented with the dilemma of being faithful to their Christian convictions and condemning the institution or of playing it down lest they offend other brethren in the denomination. In the Methodist Church this situation led in western New York to the emergence of abolitionists who later spearheaded the formation of the Wesleyan Methodist connection in 1834. These men believed that fidelity to conscience was more important than unity in the organization. They were opposed by others who felt that schism in the church was a greater evil than slavery. The doctrine of Christian perfection was now being given wide acceptance among both clergy and laity in several denominations. Notable laymen promoters were Dr. and Mrs. Walter Palmer, who sponsored holiness meetings in homes and in camp meetings. They were warmly championed by Methodist pastors such as Jesse T. Peck, Alfred Cookman, and John Inskip. Slavery was condemned by practically everyone in sympathy with revivals and with Christian perfection. A notable exception to this

were the Methodist perfectionists surrounding Phoebe Palmer. Her fast friends, Bishops Edmond James and Leonitus Hamline, were the architects of the policy of silence which later became the regret of northern Methodism. George and Jesse Peck, Nathan Bangs, Alfred Cookman and a host of her other admirers supported this fully.⁹

In 1856 the editor of the *Guide to Holiness* likewise played down the issue by asking readers to pray for the success of the right man in 1856, but identified neither the man nor the moral issues involved. The reasons behind this conviction were that to become partisans in the slavery issue would be to jeopardize the doctrine and experience of holiness. This policy continued in the Movement and later became formalized in the National

9. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

Association for the Promotion of Holiness. It is questionable whether unity purchased at the expense of a forthright espousal of social righteousness is scripturally defensible. It is also questionable whether it can be justified in terms of the longer perspective. There were those, however, who protested this ambivalence. Paralleling in many respects the Wesleyan Methodist connection was the emergence of the Free Methodist Church in western New York on the issue of worldliness and holiness. They were also avowed abolitionists, though this was not a prominent part of their emphasis. The leader of this movement, B. T. Roberts, first bishop of the Free Methodist Church, criticized leaders in the contemporary holiness movement who never prayed in public for the liberation of the slaves nor preached against extravagance in dress.¹⁰ Roberts considered the playing down of both of these issues as a compromise with worldliness, with the spirit of the age. He felt it was omitted for fear of offending participants in the Movement. After the Civil War, perfectionism and social concern seemed to part company.

The historian must record that neither the Wesleyan Methodists, nor the Free Methodists, nor the National Holiness Association, continued to stress the social application of the Gospel, along with the emphasis on holy living, except in the area of temperance. None of these groups had extensive influence in the southeastern United States, however. Another factor contributing to the decline of the social thrust of these churches was the complexity of the social revolution which was emerging. The decades following the Civil War witnessed the rapid accumulation of wealth and an intensification of social maladies. These decades saw the emergence of the American Federation of Labor and the triumph of the Trade Union movement. It has been said that the labor movement is the first and only organization in this nation which does not owe its existence to the impetus of the churches. This is perhaps a witness to the declining moral concern of the churches and also a prophecy of an increasing secularization of society. Many churches are

10. B. T. Roberts, *Holiness Teachings*, ed. B. H. Roberts (North Chili, New York: Earnest Christian Publishing House, 1893), pp. 57, 58.

showing a belated concern over this situation by such procedures as industrial chaplaincies and the observance of labor relations Sunday.

Some instructive parallels may be drawn between the situation now and that of a century ago. Then the more urgent issues were these:

- a. Should the union of the nations and churches be jeopardized in pursuit of freedom for the slaves?
- b. Should the church regulate individual conduct of members or bear witness against slavery as an institution?
- c. Should Christians pursue worthy ends by violent means?

The churches most outspoken in the denunciation of slavery served northern constituencies: the Congregationalists, Unitarians and Wesleyan Methodists. Those with a nation-wide constituency adopted a policy of silence to avoid disunity: the Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, the Y. M. C. A. and the American Tract Society. The latter organization justified its silence on the ground that their tracts should have "the approbation of all evangelical Christians."¹¹ The result was a vain attempt to get the policy changed and then a split in the Society.

The tensions of that decade brought out lessons in biblical exegesis relevant today. The pro-slavery preachers sought support for the institution by a literalistic interpretation of the Scriptures. Princeton professors and southern clergymen used ingenious exegesis to defend slavery and reflect both the perfectionists and the reformers. Thompson, author of *The New Testament on Slavery*, on the other hand, explained the absence of specific condemnation of slavery as due to the fact that the Epistles were not designed to act on society as such, but were addressed to small groups of uninfluential persons, hence the omission of matters pertaining to society as a whole. This trend anticipated the modern historical approach to the Bible. Other exegetes argued that revelation was progressive in the sense that one may gain an increasing clarity in interpreting the objective, final revelation in the Bible. Some Christians believed "His truth is marching on" while those in the "Bible belt" used a literalist interpretation to make the Bible hostile to innovation. Against this tendency men like Gilbert Haven,

11. T. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

a Methodist abolitionist-preacher, denounced those who only preach "Christ crucified," tolerate injustice, and shun condemnation of *all* sin; this he said is not our charity but cowardice.

Proper Balance Needed Now

All things considered, it must be admitted that the scriptural and early Wesleyan combination of spreading scriptural holiness and reforming the nation has not been kept together. Those denominations and holiness associations which have continued to emphasize the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection have neglected the social application of the Gospel. Most major denominations continue to stress social action but neglect revivalism and holiness. In American Christianity this has had the effect, in the popular mind, of associating social concern with liberalism in theology, often with naturalism, or even with Communism. Conversely, those who fear the approaches of liberalism in theology have been suspicious of those with a social concern because of its frequent association with liberalism. Thus, there is a cleavage which never should have occurred and which now should be corrected. The time has come for evangelicals to reaffirm the fact that we cannot love God without loving our brother also. They that love the Lord with all their hearts, soul, mind and strength are equally obligated to love their neighbor as themselves. Those who stress the "social gospel" should have a corresponding concern with personal holiness.

It has been pointed out that the modern holiness movement has never won many adherents among minority groups in the United States. Sometimes this is attributed to the relatively complicated theology of "perfectionism." This hardly seems tenable when one considers how widely common people have accepted the challenge to holy living. Nor can it be convincingly attributed to the Negro's lack of concern with deeper spiritual truths. Sometimes the Christians with the greatest spiritual perception have been non-whites. May it not be due rather to two factors? First, the relative unconcern of the promoters of holiness with minority groups, and second, with the fact that most of such concern is limited to evangelistic efforts in a somewhat patronizing manner. Many would gladly do something *for* the underprivileged but are less enthusiastic about

doing something *with* the underprivileged. In other words, the approach from the standpoint of smugness or superiority will not find a ready response for obvious reasons. Another possible reason is a conservatism which is often characteristic of evangelicals. This sometimes has resulted in a slowness to recognize the significance of contemporary events, including the current social revolution.

In justification for this attitude it is often pointed out that St. Paul did not agitate for the abolition of slaves even though there were many in the Roman empire. As Bruner has shown (*Social Justice*) the Christian leader today needs to take the whole Bible and not the New Testament only as the source of his ethics.¹² One reason why the New Testament evangelists did not aim more directly at social reform is the fact that Christianity was a minority group with no thought of any direct influence on the government. In some respects the theocracy or the monarchy during the kingdom period of Israel is more analogous to our times. Then the prophets were able to bring direct influence upon the heads of state, upon civic leaders for the reformation of manners. Today Christianity enjoys a similar strategic opportunity to influence directly mores and legislation in behalf of social justice. This opportunity was denied to the first generation of Christians. There seems little doubt that had Paul or Peter been living in a situation comparable to that of Amos, or of the present day, they would have been vocal and emphatic in demanding social justice as well as the conversion and perfection of the individuals.

The social concern of those in the Congregational tradition is much more in evidence. One example of this is the annual conference on race relations held in Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, sponsored by the United Church of Christ. To this conference come some of the top social scientists and religious leaders of the nation. It is distressing to the Christians, however, to note the small degree to which these leaders look to the church for help in the redressing of grievances. To many Negro leaders the church is irrelevant. In too many instances the facts bear them out. It is understandable that there should be resentment against "outside agitators" interfering with local

12. Emil Brunner, *Justice and the Social Order* (New York: Harpers, 1945), pp. 119 ff.

affairs; but why has it taken local leaders more than a century to assure equal opportunities to all of its citizens? It is not surprising that segregationists warn against pushing things too fast and pleading for more patience; but is more than one hundred years necessary to make practice correspond to profession? Resentment against northern newspapers and other news media is understandable, but why are southern newspapers so reticent? Segregationists of north, south, east, and west understandably resent preachments against their cherished prerogatives and assumed superiority. The tragic thing is that there are so few voices in the pulpit that are outspoken in identifying and labeling race prejudice as sin, whether it is found in north or south, whether among colored or white. A century ago northern bishops chose to keep silence about slavery but retained strictures against the dance and other forms of "worldliness." Today the reverse is true.

Is Force a Justifiable Means to a Worthy End?

The Christian goal is brotherhood, peace, and good will. The Christian brotherhood consists of all who are brothers in Christ rather than a mere fraternity. But what about the means to attain these ends? If persuasion fails, what then? If evolution does not succeed, is revolution justifiable? Does there come a time when patience can be exhausted and more drastic measures justified? These are questions which haunt earnest Christians now as in Civil War days. In particular, is the Negro justified in "sit ins," in marching in the streets, in civil disobedience? What should be the attitude of the white person who sympathizes with their goals but questions their means? Is civil disobedience ever justified even though the laws against which protest is made are unjust? Leaders like Martin Luther King have shown a remarkable restraint in the use of force. In them, force has been tempered by Christian ethics and never justifies violence or hatred. In King and his companions one finds the combination of social revolt with Christian ethics. This is not true of all leaders of social revolt, many of whom would return hatred for hatred, prejudice for prejudice, segregation with counter-segregation. Happily this group is not in a majority. Let us pray that it never will be.

The strategy of civil disobedience was effective in India because the rulers of India were Christians with a conscience.

It remains to be seen whether it can operate in South Africa against stern "Christian" leaders in the Reformed tradition, or whether it will be successful in the United States. It is already largely successful in the United States because of the effectiveness with which it confronts the conscience of the nation. Even the most ardent segregationist will admit that he believes theoretically in the equality of opportunity. He believes that eventually the Negro will have full citizenship rights, but urges him not to rush. Such statements often ignore the fact that the Negro has been waiting for a hundred years and more for white leaders to act, and for Christian ethics to be implemented.

Action Needed

The burden of this paper is that unless evangelicals become alert, articulate, and more concerned than they have been hitherto, that another embarrassing chapter will have been written into American church history books. In the forefront of those who demand equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of race, origin, or ancestry, should be those who profess perfect love to God and their fellow men. None should be more determined that social righteousness should characterize our nation than those who profess to love God with all their hearts. At the present writing it is the liberals among the churches who are most identified with the current struggle for human rights. It is good that the liberals are involved, but evangelicals have an even greater reason to be involved, especially those in the Arminian-Wesleyan tradition. To do so should not be to adopt a polity of me-too-ism, or jumping belatedly on the bandwagon of civil rights. It should arise, rather, out of a deep conviction based upon the Scriptures, that the concern of the Gospel is to preach deliverance to the captive and the recovering of sight to the blind, upon developing each individual to his ultimate capacity in grace and in usefulness. With the present state of affairs, public schools, theatres, and bars will be desegregated long before churches are. Some churches are social clubs rather than a haven where the distraught can find guidance and grace regardless of his color or background. Most churches seem to be seeking to save their own souls by neutralism; few are willing to lose their souls in social redemption. Not only Scripture but emerging history will demonstrate and is

demonstrating that "he that loseth his life shall find it, while he that seeketh to save it will lose it."

The church's fear of losing its life is seen most frequently in the migration of urban churches to suburbs. The downtown sections, where rent is lower, are frequently occupied by colored people. Instead of integrating them into the congregation the "good" white prefer to migrate. There should be churches in the growing suburbs, but should evangelical churches desert the downtown areas rather than remain to minister to a multi-racial community? The tragedy is that some young ministers in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition, including Asbury Seminary alumni, seeking to serve a church in a mixed community, do not dare to make house-to-house calls because they would not feel free to invite a colored resident to their church. To deny admission to colored people for fear of offending the "proper" white Christians is a betrayal of Christian witness. There is emerging a new generation of prophetic voices whose status symbol is not an honorary D.D., but the fact that they have been in prison in a crusade for desegregation. Christian pastors and editors have both a responsibility and an opportunity, even at this late date, to give effective evidence that those who are truly Christians take the Golden Rule seriously and demand its application to all citizens of the community, not by work alone, but also by deed.

Holiness people have always been alert and wary of varied forms of "worldliness." The concept of worldliness should not be narrowed but widened to include moral cowardice, which prefers a false peace or neutralism when sin, however subtly disguised, is threatening to stifle truth and justice. The real peril in this nation is that minority groups will conclude that Christian forbearance, patience, and love will not assure to them and their children their legitimate rights, and they will resort to hatred, resentment, and the use of force as urged by more radical, less Christian, leaders. The temptation for Negro moderates now is to become more radical and to depend less on moral suasion. The temptation for white moderates is to remain inarticulate and neutral on moral issues such as equal rights for all. If a president of these United States can declare himself unequivocally in behalf of justice for minorities in the face of segregationist scorn, should Christian clergymen and other leaders do less? If churches and pulpits exist merely to maintain the status quo, to perpetuate themselves, they

cease to justify their existence. They now have a belated opportunity to help "reform the nation" by *practicing* the norms of scriptural holiness.

The urgency is upon us. There is a call for repentance for our sins of omission in bringing practice into line with pronouncements. On the mission frontiers the Gospel is being challenged as it has not been since the seventh century Moslem advance, by secularism, ancient religions revitalized, and militant Communism. One of the greatest hindrances abroad to missionary advance is racial discrimination at the home base. When nationals learn that color can make a person unwelcome in our "good" churches here he turns from our gospel message with scorn and resentment. The courage of the missionary is too often unmatched by leaders in the home church who ignore the problem of race prejudice.¹³ Many gladly send money to help evangelize Africa who would refuse to worship beside a Christian of African origin at the local church. Preachers, Sunday School teachers, and public school teachers have a major responsibility here for moral leadership. Too often, like politicians, they wait for the moral sentiments of the community to change before declaring themselves. *New York Times* columnist, Mr. James Reston, is convinced that the key to the situation now rests with the churches. Said he, "If the preachers said what they really thought about this social crisis, and even half of those who heard... they wrote their honest convictions... to Capitol Hill the political balance on racial equality might easily be transformed."¹⁴ As a leading editorial in an influential journal has recently exhorted, "It is time for evangelicals to reconsider their responsibility for social concern and public affairs, let them do so according to the Biblical pattern."¹⁵

The transition from silent sympathy to unequivocal witness, and from witness to action calls for patience, tact and courage. But the summons for creative thought, speech and action has

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13. Ross Goggins, "Missions and Prejudice," *Christianity Today*, January 17, 1964, p. 5.
 14. James Reston, cited in *The Free Methodist* (CNS), January 21, 1964, p. 16.
 15. Editorial, "Evangelicals and Public Affairs," *Christianity Today*, January 17, 1964, p. 24.

now become imperative. The words of the poet-prophet written in 1845 were never more relevant than today.

Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth and falsehood
For the good or evil side;
Some great cause, some new decision,
Offering each the bloom or blight,
And the choice goes by forever
'Twixt that darkness and that light.

Then to side with truth is noble,
When we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit,
And 'tis prosperous to be just;
Then it is the brave man chooses
While the coward stands aside,
Till the multitude make virtue
Of the faith they had denied.

Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet 'tis truth alone is strong;
Though her portion be the scaffold,
And upon the throne be wrong,
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow
Keeping watch above his own.

James Russell Lowell (1845)